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ABSTRACT

A description of the role and status of the English language in Iraq begins with an overview of the distribution of English speakers and the most common uses of English. Subsequent sections outline: (1) the use and status of English within the educational system at all levels, including teacher education; (2) the availability of English language materials and resources; (3) the structure of educational administration relating to English instruction; (4) development and planning efforts; (5) English outside the educational system; (6) British, American, and other agency support for English teaching; (7) commercial opportunities relating to the English language; (8) creative writing in English; (9) current research; and (10) other sources of information about the situation. A concluding statement notes that the main weaknesses in the present English teaching situation are the standards of training and performance of English teachers in the schools, especially at the primary level, over-rigid insistence on teaching language forms rather than communication skills, rapidly dating textbooks, lack of ready access to a range of English language materials, and the ban on travel outside Iraq preventing teachers from attending specialized courses, a situation tied to political issues. (MSE)

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ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: Iraq

Date: January 1985

1. ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

The official language of Iraq is Arabic, spoken by 81 per cent of the population of fourteen million. A large minority (15 per cent) of the population speak Kurdish, and there are smaller groups speaking Turkish (Turkoman), Armenian, Chaldean and other minority languages. Turkish gave way to Arabic as the language of government after the First World War, when English established itself in the schools and became the second language of the ruling and educated classes. English is now the most important foreign language in Iraq.

Within Iraq, English is not used as a means of communication except in the medical world, in parts of the oil industry and in the newer specializations such as computers. However, English is the predominant language of international communication in trade, diplomacy, industry, technology and science, and of access to research in all fields of learning. A law passed in 1984 has made proficiency in English obligatory for all Iraqi diplomats, entry to and promotion within the Diplomatic Service are dependent on a knowledge of English classified as good, very good or excellent.

English is used - though not exclusively - in the small number of postgraduate courses in Iraqi universities (1,895 students in the year 1981-2). English is also important for scholarship holders hoping to gain postgraduate places overseas, though holders of Iraqi government awards are funded for up to six months of pre-sessional English before they take a postgraduate course outside Iraq. United Nations agencies all insist on high standards of English before they allocate study awards.

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English is now taught to every Iraqi child in school from the fifth year of education until the end of secondary school, though English is not used as a medium of instruction in either primary or secondary education. Although English is also taught to tertiary level students, it is no longer used as the language of instruction except in undergraduate courses in medicine, dentistry and English and for parts of the courses in engineering and architecture.

Few Iraqis read for pleasure, but a small minority - chiefly those who have studied overseas at postgraduate level - enjoy reading English books, though there is a general shortage of such books in Iraq. Very few English books are available in translation.

2. ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Primary Level

The primary school cycle lasts six years, children normally entering the system at the age of six, after - in some cases - up to two non-compulsory years of pre-primary education. Under the provisions of a law passed in 1976, primary education has been compulsory since the school year 1978-9. In the year 1982-3 there were 10,223 primary schools in Iraq with a total primary school population of 2,614,927 (46 per cent girls).

English is started at the beginning of the fifth year of primary education (age 10+) with four periods a week. The prescribed textbook for every child is the New English Course for Iraq, produced by the Institute for the Development of English Language Teaching in Iraq (IDELTI). Books 1 and 2 are used in the fifth and sixth years of primary education, respectively.

Promotion from class to class is based on annual examinations culminating in the Primary Baccalaureate (primary school leaving certificate) examination which is conducted by the Ministry of Education and includes an examination in English.

Secondary Level

The secondary school cycle of six years is divided into two stages:

Intermediate - 3 years (years 1 to 3)

Preparatory - 3 years (years 4 to 6)

In the year 1982-3 there were 1,977 secondary schools in Iraq with a secondary school population of 971,827 (34.5 per cent girls). In the final two years of secondary preparatory education some specialization is introduced, the main concentration being on either science (64 per cent of students enrolled at this level in 1982-3) or literature (36 per cent of students in 1982-3). In addition to the secondary schools mentioned above, there are a number of industrial, agricultural and commercial secondary schools at the secondary preparatory level. In the year 1982-3 the total enrolment at these 157 vocational secondary schools was 61,383 (31 per cent girls).

There are five to six English periods a week at secondary intermediate and preparatory level. The prescribed textbooks for every child are Books 3 to 8 of the New English Course for Iraq.

Throughout the secondary school system there are mid-year examinations, and promotion from class to class depends on success in the annual end-of-year examinations. Both mid-year and end-of-year examinations include an examination in English. At the end of the secondary intermediate stage students sit for the Intermediate Baccalaureate (intermediate school leaving certificate) examination conducted by the Ministry of Education, and at the end of the secondary preparatory stage students take the Ministry's secondary (sixth form) Baccalaureate (secondary school leaving certificate) examination, the results of which determine admission to tertiary education. Both the Intermediate Baccalaureate and the sixth form Baccalaureate include examinations in English.

Tertiary Level

In Iraq's six universities, to which 18,940 first-year undergraduates were admitted in the autumn of 1982 and which in 1982-3 had a total undergraduate body of 85,573 students (33 per cent girls), the typical pattern of formal English teaching outside the English sections or departments of the Colleges of Arts and of Education is one course of two hours per week for the first year of a four-year undergraduate course. At the non-formal level, one subject per semester in science, technology, and a few other courses may be taught through the medium of English.

University English sections or departments in Colleges of Arts and of Education are allocated only those students whose secondary school leaving examination (Baccalaureate) results are not good enough to secure entrance to the Colleges of Medicine, Engineering or Science; their command of English on entry tends to be correspondingly weaker. First-degree courses in English are offered by the Colleges of Arts of the Universities of Baghdad, Al-Mustansiriyah (also in Baghdad), Basra and Mosul to several hundred students and last for four years. The syllabus, centrally determined by the Ministry of Higher Education, provides for approximately half of the English studies components of the course to be devoted to language and half to literature. First-degree courses in English, also of four years' duration, are offered by the Colleges of Education of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul Universities. The syllabus includes English language, literature and methodology. Al-Mustansiriyah University in Baghdad and Mosul University offer four-year first-degree courses in translation (English-Arabic-English, and some work in French).

Facilities are available for a small number of the best graduates in English to take a two-year postgraduate course in English leading to the award of a Master's degree at Baghdad, Basra and Mosul Universities. The first year is spent on course work and the second year on the writing of a dissertation.

Technical and vocational education at tertiary level is provided by the Foundation of Technical Institutes, which co-ordinates the work of twenty-two institutes of technology, agriculture and administration. These institutes offer a two-year diploma course to students whose secondary school leaving examination (Baccalaureate) results are not good enough for them to gain admission to a university. The aim of the institutes is to produce middle-level technicians. English is taught in the first year of study for two hours a week. Total enrolment in the institutes in 1982-3 was 30,687 students (24 per cent girls).

Until 1983 there were two patterns of training for primary school teachers:

Students who had completed secondary intermediate school and passed the Intermediate Baccalaureate examination (i.e. after nine years of school) took a three-year training course leading to a teacher's certificate in a teacher training school instead of continuing with their secondary preparatory education.

Students who had completed their secondary education and passed the sixth form Baccalaureate examination (i.e. after twelve years of school) took a two-year training course leading to a teacher's diploma in a teacher training institute.

In 1982-3 there were 26,191 students (61 per cent girls) in thirty-six teacher training schools and a further 6,483 students (51 per cent girls) in seven teacher training institutes.

The Ministry of Education proposes to merge the two systems of training primary school teachers by creating a unified five-year course following on from secondary intermediate education for students who have passed the Intermediate Baccalaureate examination. Two unified five-year teacher training institutes started experimentally in Baghdad in 1983-4 and this pattern of primary teacher training is to be extended throughout Iraq. The new five-year course provides, for the first time, for specialization in teaching English at the primary level.

Training of teachers for secondary schools is carried out by Colleges of Education in the form of four-year undergraduate courses at Baghdad, Basra and Mosul Universities.

3. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

Teachers of English in the primary and secondary schools are all Iraqis, and - with only the most occasional exception - this is also the case in the universities and other tertiary institutions.

Most primary school teachers have completed either a three-year post-secondary intermediate course in a teacher training school or a two-year post-secondary course in a teacher training institute. A few primary school teachers are university graduates. Until the reorganization of primary school teacher training, begun in 1983, there was no provision for specializing in the teaching of English, though an increasing number of teachers in the primary schools were beginning to teach English predominantly or exclusively.

Most secondary school teachers of English are graduates of the English sections or departments of university Colleges of Education and Arts. The calibre of secondary school teachers of English tends to be higher than that of their primary school counterparts.

In-service training of English teachers is carried out by IDELTI, which runs courses at its centre in Baghdad of between one month's and six months' duration for both primary and secondary school teachers.

Locally run in-service courses for teachers of English in the governorates outside Baghdad are provided by 'leaders' - a specially selected group of secondary school teachers who have taken a six-month course at IDELTI to fit them for the role of local trainers. Recently, 'leaders' in the governorates outside Baghdad have acted as course tutors on a part-time distance learning/correspondence course for teachers of English, using materials prepared centrally by IDELTI.

4. MATERIALS SUPPORT

The New English Course for Iraq, written by a committee in the Ministry of Education and produced by IDELTI, is in use in all schools in Iraq. The series consists of eight books, each accompanied by a teacher's guide and cassettes, and caters for the fifth and sixth years of primary school and all six years of secondary school. Books 1 to 6 of the New English Course for Iraq are oral in approach and based on the structural method, though a somewhat more communicative approach has been adopted in Books 7 and 8. While it is generally held that children have a better grasp of spoken English than was the case with the previous textbooks in use, reading and writing ability in English lags behind.

'Literary readers' - much simplified and adapted from the original by a committee in the Ministry of Education - are used in secondary preparatory schools as follows:

Secondary preparatory - year 4 Kipps (Wells)

year 5 Oliver Twist (Dickens)

year 6 The Merchant of Venice (Shakespeare)

IDELTI produces books and other materials for English teachers to supplement the teacher's guides to the New English Course for Iraq. They are mostly derivative and include a testing guide, guides to the pronunciation of English, and a guide to the teaching of writing.

Books published overseas and used for university courses are bought centrally from European and American publishers by the universities and/or the Ministry of Higher Education. The processes involved in obtaining books from overseas are very time-consuming. Recently, local textbook-writing committees have been set up to produce textbooks for Iraqi university courses in line with official policy that textbooks used throughout the educational system should be 'home grown' and reflect the cultural and political values of the Iraqi government and the ruling Ba'ath party. Some of these textbooks are strongly derivative. Most university syllabuses - including the one for English - have been centralized and unified.

University libraries are not particularly well stocked and operate on a closed-access system. Basic texts in English are, however, available as are certain academic journals. The public library system is still in its infancy.

Virtually no books in English are available in bookshops because of import and censorship restrictions.

5. EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH TEACHING

Two Iraqi Ministries are concerned with education. The Ministry of Education is responsible for pre-primary, primary and secondary (including vocational secondary) education, and for teacher training schools and institutes. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research is responsible for the universities and technical institutes. The administration of the Iraqi educational system is highly centralized, and the Ministry of Education prescribes textbooks - written by subject committees in the Ministry - for use

in primary and secondary schools. Subject curricula for tertiary education are determined centrally by committees in the Ministry of Higher Education. There is no private education in Iraq (except for temporarily resident foreign children); education throughout the state system (including tertiary education) is free, and textbooks are loaned to students without charge.

The Minister of Education has two undersecretaries - for technical and for administrative affairs - to whom the directors-general of departments in the Ministry report. The undersecretary for technical affairs is responsible for departments concerned with pre- and in-service training, evaluation and examinations, curriculum and teaching aids, Kurdish studies, cultural relations, and supervision (i.e. the inspectorate). In 1980-81 there were 929 primary supervisors (i.e. primary school inspectors) and 302 specialist supervisors (i.e. secondary school subject inspectors) of whom 36 were specifically responsible for English in the secondary schools. The undersecretary for administrative affairs is responsible for departments concerned with primary and pre-primary education, secondary education, physical education, administrative and financial affairs, and for the education offices in the capitals of the governorates. The Department of Educational Planning reports directly to the Minister of Education. IDELTI, while legally autonomous, is administratively responsible to the undersecretary for technical affairs.

The Presidents of the six universities and of the Foundation of Technical Institutes report directly to the Minister of Higher Education, who also has three counsellors responsible for scientific and technical affairs (including curriculum matters), administrative affairs and planning, and cultural affairs.

6. DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

The origins of the Iraqi educational system are rooted in Koranic schools, attached to every mosque, in which the Koran was learnt by rote and the interpretations of the religious instructors (mullahs) were never questioned. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans established a rudimentary schooling system, with a free primary school in each Qadha (administrative sub-division) headquarters. A boys' secondary school was founded in Baghdad in 1870 and a girls' primary school in 1898. Turkish, however, and not Arabic was the medium of education. It has been estimated that in 1850 half of one per cent of the townspeople in Iraq were literate, while by 1900 the figure had increased to between five and ten per cent of townspeople. In the same period small groups of foreign missionaries also established a few schools, particularly among the Christian minorities.

After the First World War, the education system of Iraq expanded rapidly under the British Mandate and the Hashemite kingdom, and it was during this period that the teaching of English as a subject in the last two years of primary school and at secondary school was established.

Since the overthrow of the monarchy in the revolution of 1958 and more particularly since the present ruling Ba'ath party came to power in the revolution of 1968, the education system has been organized on Arab Ba'athist socialist lines and has been progressively purged of foreign cultural influences. In 1974 the few remaining private schools were incorporated in the state sector. As far as possible, the English cultural background has been removed from the form of English now taught in the Iraqi school system.

7. ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

There are no private commerial schools of English in Iraq.

Some Ministries, government offices and commercial firms run English courses for their employees. Teachers on such courses are frequently university lecturers or other teachers of English working in their spare time. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Foreign Service Institute runs English courses as part of its training programme for Iraqi diplomats.

The only established English-medium school in Iraq is the Baghdad International School, which caters for about 600 expatriate English-speaking primary and secondary school children between the ages of four and sixteen. The school follows a predominantly American curriculum; the teachers are of mixed nationality.

8. BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

The British Council's Direct Teaching of English Operation (DTEO) in Baghdad runs English courses on a part-time basis for adults over the age of eighteen. Courses offered range from those for complete beginners to those preparing students for the University of Cambridge First Certificate in English examination. At the time of writing, 800 students are being taught by five London-contracted teachers and six locally engaged teachers (with a further three teachers on leave of absence). The British Council's students, most of whom are young Iraqi students, government employees, and professional and commercial people, receive six hours of English tuition a week.

The British Council has a memorandum of co-operation with IDELTI which provides for the British Council's English Language Officer to devote part of his or her time to consultancy and advisory work for IDELTI. The British Council offers three scholarships a year to IDELTI nominees for one-year postgraduate courses in English language teaching/applied linguistics at British universities, and two bursaries a year for IDELTI nominees to attend British Council summer schools in Britain.

The British Council's English Language Officer maintains professional links with the English sections or departments of university Colleges of Arts and Education, with the Foundation of Technical Institutes, and with other institutions.

The British Council administers the English Langauge Testing Service (ELTS) tests to students intending to study in Britain, and is the centre for many British-based examinations, including the University of Cambridge's First Certificate in English and Certificate of Proficiency in English examinations and the University of London's General Certificate of Education examinations.

The British Council has a well-stocked library in Baghdad which has a section on English language teaching and applied linguistics and a large stock of supplementary readers. The library is much used, particularly by university students. The educational enquiry service provides information on courses in Britain at all levels, including courses at English language schools and first-degree and postgraduate courses specializing in English, English language teaching and applied linguistics.

9. AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

Diplomatic relations between Iraq and the USA, broken off in 1967, were restored in 1984. There has been no American support for English teaching in Iraq for many years, but recently a Cultural Affairs Officer has been appointed to the American Embassy and the situation may change.

10. OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

There are a number of United Nations agency-funded projects in Iraq; English is used as the primary language of communication on the projects and with agency headquarters. The United Nations Economic Commission for Western Asia, whose offical languages are Arabic and English, moved its heaquarters to Baghdad in 1982.

11. COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

The combination of official government policy, financial constraints (increasingly severe as the Iran/Iraq war continues), import and censorship restrictions inhibit the adoption of English teaching materials from Britain in the school system, though there are limited opportunities for the university English sections and departments and the university libraries to acquire books from Britain. However, there is almost unlimited demand from educated Iraqis at an individual level for all types of books in English, including English language textbooks and cassettes, reference books, literary and critical works, and books on language teaching and applied linguistics - a demand which cannot be met at present because of the import and censorship restrictions.

There has been considerable demand from Iraqi students for places in language schools in Britain, especially from holders of Iraqi government awards which entitle them to up to six months' pre-sessional tuition before starting a postgraduate course in Britain. The demand has lessened recently because of the decrease in Iraqi government awards, owing to financial constraints imposed by the war and because of the travel restrictions imposed in 1982 which severely restricted the number of Iraqis able to travel abroad. The situation is unlikely to improve until the end of the war.

12. CREATIVE WRITING

There is little if any creative writing in English, though English translations of some forms of Arabic creative writing are occasionally published in the Baghdad Observer, the Iraqi government English language newspaper.

13. CURRENT RESEARCH

Students on Masters' degree courses in English at Baghdad, Basra and Mosul Universities do a limited amount of research work for the dissertation written during the second year of the course. Topics of research have included contrastive analyses of English and Arabic, analyses of the New English Course for Iraq, and research into various areas of English literature. Lecturers in the English sections and departments of the universities carry out a limited amount of research in their own academic fields, though facilities - especially library facilities and access to academic journals - for such research are limited.

14. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

Education Law number 118 of 1976 (Compulsory Education).

Resolution number 1060 of 1984 (Compulsory English for Diplomats).

Ministry of Education Annual Report 1980/81 - Educational Statistics. *

Ministry of Planning Central Statistical Organisation: Annual Abstract of Statistics 1982.*

Prospectuses of Iraqi universities and of the Foundation of Technical Institutes.

15 GENERAL STATEMENT

The main weaknesses in the present English teaching situation in Iraq are the standards of training and performance of English teachers in the schools, particularly at primary level, the over-rigid insistence on teaching the form of the language rather than the ability to communicate in it, the rapidly dating textbooks in use in the schools, the lack of ready access to a range of British books, magazines or newspapers, and the ban on travel outside Iraq which has prevented English teachers and lecturers from attending short or long specialist courses in Britain. While there is talk of action to remedy this situation, change can perforce only be gradual until at least the end of the Iran/Iraq war.

* More recent statistics are not yet available.